

©2003-2009 Medical Group Management Association ® All Rights Reserved

Web-exclusive article: </article.aspx?id=29728> *MGMA Connexion* </virtualconnexion>, October 2009

Keep your practice strong

A checklist for standing up to trying times



By [Mary J. Witt <mailto:mjwv1@aol.com>](mailto:mjwv1@aol.com), MSW, MGMA member and vice president, The Camden Group, El Segundo, Calif.

How has your practice fared this past year? Your responses to nine key trends determine how well your organization copes with uncertain times. Here are suggestions to help your group succeed.

Troubled economy

High unemployment has swollen the ranks of the under- and uninsured.

- Consider offering patients discounts for early payment; create payment plans for large balances.
- Collect all co-pays and balances at time of service. Verify insurance eligibility/authorization of all patients before delivering service.
- Ensure that employees understand their roles in the practice's success.
- Create compensation models that align physician and staff performance with the economic drivers.

Declining utilization

As patients lose jobs, face higher deductibles or lose insurance coverage, they may postpone care, especially for elective procedures.

- Monitor practice and individual provider volume.
- Focus on core services to maximize quality and patient satisfaction.
- Strengthen recall systems to encourage patients to schedule medically necessary appointments.
- Use responsive scheduling systems, such as advanced access.
- Consider e-visits, e-mail access and on-time scheduling.
- Determine whether reimbursement for in-house services and procedures justifies the cost.
- Manage variable expenses to volume; implement flexible staffing to respond to volume shifts. Align incentives throughout the practice.

Adopt technology

Starting in 2011, the government will give monetary incentives to adopt EHR.

- Maximize use of your practice management system, EHR and other technology.
- If you don't have an EHR, plan to acquire one.
- Stay current on the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services' definition of "meaningful use" of EHR and other Economic Stimulus Bill regulations to ensure that you can meet requirements.
- If you serve a large Medicare population, implement e-prescribing software to take advantage of Medicare bonuses.
- Explore the telemedicine and e-visits to expand into new geographic areas.

Physician performance transparency and report cards

Many payers, including Medicare, are exploring incentives and penalties to encourage better outcomes.

- Collect internal data and manage care to demonstrate value (outcome and price). Use disease registries, care flow sheets and patient satisfaction surveys to ensure quality.
- Make quality and patient satisfaction a priority for everyone in the practice. Include quality measures in physician and staff compensation plans.
- Monitor public reporting sites (e.g., health plans, Yelp, Angie's List) to learn what's said about your practice.

Changing delivery models

- Assess whether your current care delivery model is optimal for your patients. Evaluate new approaches such as care teams, medical home, e-visits, telemedicine, home monitoring, bundled payments and accountable-care organizations.

Medical group restructuring/consolidation

Health care reform is driving approaches that build on clinical and financial integration to gain efficiencies.

- Understand local hospitals' needs and physician alignment goals.
- Evaluate opportunities to strengthen your practice's position in the marketplace via mergers, acquisitions or recruitment.
- Assess joint ventures to ensure they meet Stark requirements.
- Ensure that hospital relationships meet the test for fair-market value to avoid Stark and anti-kickback issues.

Effective physician leadership

- Ensure that your governance structure defines decision-making responsibility and authority for the board, physician leaders and management.
- Ensure that leaders' job descriptions and skills reflect the group's needs and expectations.
- Implement an annual evaluation process to assess leader performance.
- Create a leadership development program.

Physician shortages

Physician shortages, especially in primary care, are making recruitment difficult. Poor morale may increase as older physicians grow to resent a profession that has not met their expectations and an economy that has made it difficult for them to retire.

- Routinely measure and monitor physician morale and satisfaction.
- Review physicians' tasks for appropriateness.
- Use a care-team model.
- Assign mentors to new physicians to facilitate their integration.
- Involve all physicians in medical group decision-making to foster involvement and ownership.
- Design work and compensation models that address physicians requesting part-time status.

Dynamic environment with changing patient needs

A clearly defined vision and goals provide direction to respond to changing conditions.

- Conduct an annual SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) assessment to re-evaluate strategies to respond to the changing environment.
- Establish annual performance measures based on your strategic plan. Monitor performance and respond to negative variances.

Regardless of particular challenges, keep a focus on the basics: a clearly defined vision, meeting the needs of patients efficiently and effectively, implementing sound operational work flows and valuing your employees. In difficult times, superior leadership can mean success.